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THE WORKMANSHIP OF "AS YOU LIKE IT"

BY SIR ARTHUR QUILLER-COUCH.

FOR the actual plot of *As You Like It* we have not to seek very far. Shakespeare took his story from a contemporary novel, *Rosalynde, Euphues' Golden Legacie*, written by Thomas Lodge and first published in 1590. Lodge derived a good part of his story from the *Tale of Gamelyn*, included in some MSS of the *Canterbury Tales*, but certainly not written by Chaucer and probably packed by him among his papers as material for the *Yeoman's Tale* which he never wrote.¹

The *Tale of Gamelyn* (as perhaps you remember) runs in this fashion:

Litheth and lesteneth || and herkeneth aright,
And ye schulle heere a talking || of a doughty knight;
Sire Johan of Boundys || was his righte name . . .

and he leaves three sons. The eldest, succeeding to the estate, misuses the youngest brother, who triumphs in a

¹On this I cannot do better than quote Professor Skeat:

"Some have supposed, with great reason, that this tale occurs among the rest because it is one which Chaucer intended to recast, although in fact, he did not live to rewrite a single line of it. This is the more likely because the tale is a capital one in itself, well worthy of being rewritten even by so great a poet; indeed, it is well known that the plot of the favorite play known to us all by the title of *As You Like It* was derived from it at second-hand. But I cannot but protest against the stupidity of the botcher whose hand wrote above it, "The Coke's Tale of Gamelyn." This was done because it happened to be found *next after* the "Coke's Tale. . . . The fitness of things ought to show at once that this "Tale of Gamelyn," a tale of the woods in true Robin Hood style, could only have been placed in the mouth of him "who bare a mighty bow," and who knew all the ways of wood-craft; in one word, of the Yeoman. . . . And we get hence the additional hint, that the Yeoman's Tale was to have followed the Coke's Tale, a tale of fresh country life succeeding one of the close back-streets of the city. No better place could be found for it."

I am sure that Skeat was right.

wrestling-bout and, escaping to the greenwood with an old retainer, Adam the Spencer, becomes an outlaw. The eldest brother, Johan, as sheriff, pursues him—just as "the proud sheriff of Nottingham" pursues Robin Hood. He is taken, and bailed; returns, in ballad-fashion (like the Heir of Linne, for example), just in time to save his bail, and the wicked Johan is sent to the gallows.

Upon this artless ballad Lodge tacked and embroidered a love-story—of an exiled King of France and of his daughter, Rosalind, who falls in love with the young wrestler, and escapes with the usurper's daughter Alinda (Celia) to the greenwood. As in the play, the usurper's daughter becomes "Aliena" and Rosalind disguises herself as a page and calls herself "Ganymede." The name of the faithful old retainer, "Adam," persists down from *The Tale of Gamelyn* to *As You Like It*, and is the name of the character which (tradition says) Shakespeare as an actor personated in his own play.

So much for the source of the plot. But the plot of *As You Like It* is no great matter. Indeed, I would point out that by the end of Act i it is practically over and done with. With the opening of Act ii we reach the Forest of Arden; and thenceforth, like the exiled Duke and his followers, we "fleet the time carelessly, as they did in the golden world." But let me quote the whole of Charles the Wrestler's answer to Oliver's question, "Where will the old Duke live?"; for in some five lines it gives us not only the Robin Hood and Gamelyn tradition of the story but the atmosphere in which Shakespeare is to clothe it:

They say he is already in the forest of Arden, and a many merry men with him; and there they live like the old Robin Hood of England: they say many young gentlemen flock to him every day, and fleet the time carelessly, as they did in the golden world.

"They say . . . they say"—I note those two "they says," to return to them anon. For the moment let us be content to mark that no sooner do we arrive at the fringe of this forest with the other fugitives (and I break off to remark that they all in turn reach it dead-beat. Sighs Rosalind, "O Jupiter, how weary are my spirits!" invoking Jupiter as a Ganymede should. Touchstone retorts, "I care not for my spirits, if my legs were not weary"; and Celia entreats, "I pray you, bear with me; I cannot go

further:" as, later on, old Adam echoes, "Dear master, I can go no further"; and again, you will remember, Oliver arrives footsore, in rags, and stretches himself to sleep, so dog-tired that even a snake, coiling about his throat, fails to awaken him. It is only the young athlete Orlando who bears the journey well)—I say that the fugitives, and we too, no sooner win to the forest than life is found to have changed its values for us, as it has awhile already for the Duke and his followers. Henceforth we hear next to nothing of the usurping Duke Ferdinand and his court, and we care less. We have left him behind. He is not suffered again to obtrude his person, and in the last Act we learn of his repentance but by report:

Duke Frederick, hearing how that every day
Men of great worth resorted to this forest,
Address'd a mighty power; which were on foot,
In his own conduct, purposely to take
His brother here and put him to the sword:
And to the skirts of this wild wood he came;
Where meeting with an old religious man;
After some questioning with him, was converted
Both from his enterprise and from the world;
His crown bequeathing to his banish'd brother,
And all their lands restored to them again
That were with him exiled.

"I do not perceive the use of this hermit," says Dr. Johnson of the holy man introduced with very similar abruptness into the last Act of *The Merchant of Venice*. I venture to echo it of this intruder upon the last Act of *As You Like It*. Whoso lists may believe in him. But who cares?

The wicked brother Oliver is even more violently converted to a right frame of mind, by means of a snake and a lion. We are not shown it. We don't want to see it: we take his word for it, and quite cheerfully, in spite of its monstrous improbability. For, again, who cares? We are fleeing the time carelessly; we are "not at home" to him, but engaged with Rosalind's wooing, Touchstone's amorous vagaries with his Audrey, the pure pastoral of Silvius and Phebe, Jaques' moralizing, the killing of the deer, food and song beneath the bough.

Some years ago, in hope to get a better understanding of Shakespeare, a friend and I tracked the Warwickshire Avon

together, from its source on Naseby battlefield down to Tewkesbury, where, by a yet more ancient battlefield, it is gathered to the greater Severn. From Naseby, where we found its source among the "good cabbage" of an inn-garden, we followed it afoot through "wide-skirted meads," past "poor pelting villages, sheep-cotes and farms," to Rugby. This upper region of Avon undulates in long ridge and furrow divided by stiff ox-fences (the "bull-fences" of the fox-hunter—for this is the famous Pytchley country); and in Shakespeare's time these same ridges and furrows were mainly planted with rye. We went down through this pastoral heart of England, where yet (as Avon draws the line between her north and her south) so many of her bloody internal battles have been decided—Bosworth and Naseby by her headwaters, Evesham and Tewkesbury by her lower fords—and at Rugby we took ship: that is to say, we launched a canoe.

I am pretty sure she was the first ever launched upon Avon from Rugby. A small curious crowd bore murmured testimony to this. The Avon is not—or was not in those days—a pleasure stream. You might meet a few boats, above Warwick, a few at Stratford. Far lower down, below Stratford, the river was made navigable in 1637. But the locks are decayed, and the waterway disused. I suppose that along its extent, half the few houses by this most lovely river resolutely turn their back gardens on it.

On the second day, after much pulling through reed beds and following for many miles Avon's always leisurely meanders, we ported over Bubbenhall weir, fetched north-east, then south-east, and came to the upper bridge of Stoneleigh Deer Park.

A line of swinging deer-fences hung from the arches of the bridge, the river trailing between their bars. We, having permission, pushed cautiously under these—which in a canoe was not easy. Beyond the barrier we looked to right and left, amazed. We had passed from a sluggish brook, twisting among water-plants and willows, to a pleasant river, expanding down between wide lawns, by slopes of bracken, by the roots of gigantic trees—oaks, Spanish oaks, wych-elms, stately firs, sweet chestnuts, backed by filmy larch coppices.

This was Arden, the forest of Arden, actually Stoneleigh-in-Arden, and Shakespeare's very Arden.

Actually, as we rested on our paddles, down to a shallow ahead—their accustomed ford, no doubt—a herd of deer came daintily and charged across, splashing; first the bucks, in single file, then the does in a body. The very bed of Avon changes just here: the river now brawling by a shallow, now sliding over slabs of sandstone.

This (I repeat) is verily and historically Arden. We know that Arden—a lovely word in itself—was endeared to Shakespeare by scores of boyish memories; Arden was his mother's maiden name. I think it arguable of the greatest creative artists that, however they learn and improve, they are always trading on the stored memories of childhood. I am sure that, as Shakespeare turned the pages of Lodge's *Rosalynde*,—as sure as if my ears heard him,—he cried to himself, "Arden? This made to happen in a Forest of Arden, in France? But I have wandered in a Forest of Arden ten times lovelier; and, translated thither, ten times lovelier shall be the tale!"

And he is in such a hurry to get to it!

The opening Act of *As You Like It* (you will note) abounds in small carelessness of detail. Rosalind is taller than Celia in one passage, shorter in another: a name, "Jaques," is bestowed on an unimportant character, forgotten, and later used again for an important one; in one passage there is either confusion in the names of the two Dukes, exiled and regnant, or the words are given to the wrong speaker. Orlando's protasis is a mere stage trick; and the persiflage between Rosalind and Celia has a false sparkle. Actually it is dull, level, chop-logic, repetitive in the rhythm of its sentences. In fact, the whole of the language of this Act, when you weigh it carefully, is curiously monotonous. It affects to be sprightly, but lacks true wit. Until he gets to Arden, Touchstone never finds himself. All goes to show that Shakespeare, while laying out his plot, was impatient of it and ardent for Arden.

Now, in Stoneleigh Deer Park in Arden I saw the whole thing, as though Corin's crook moved above the ferns, and Orlando's ballads fluttered on the boles. There was the very oak beneath which Jaques moralized on the deer—a monster, thirty-nine feet around (for I measured it), not far above the ford across which the herd had splashed, its "antique roots" writhing over the red sandstone rock down to the water's brim. And I saw the whole thing for what the four

important Acts of it really are—not as a drama, but as a dream, or rather a dreamy delicious fantasy, and especially a fantasy in color.

I want to make this plain: and that the play, not my criticism, is fanciful. I had always thought of *As You Like It*—most adorable play of boyhood and then not second even to *The Tempest*—in terms of color, if I may so put it. I mean this: Shakespeare, improving on Lodge, invented Jaques and Touchstone. Both are eminently piquant figures under the forest boughs; both piquantly out of place, while most picturesquely in place; both critics, and contrasted critics, of the artificial-natural life ("the simple life" is our term nowadays) in which the exiled Duke and his courtiers profess themselves to revel. Hazlitt says of Jaques that "he is the only purely contemplative character in Shakespeare." Well, with much more going on about him, Horatio, in *Hamlet*, is just as inactive—the static, philosophical man, the *punctum indifferens* set in the midst of tragic aberrations. This function of the critic amid the comic aberrations of *As You Like It*, Jaques and Touchstone share between them. Jaques moralizes; Touchstone comments and plays the fool, his commentary enlightening common sense, his folly doing common sense no less service by consciously caricaturing all prevalent folly around it.

Now, as contrast of character indicated by color, can you conceive anything better than Jaques' sad-colored habit opposed to Touchstone's gay motley? With what a whoop of delight the one critic happens on the other!—

A fool, a fool! I met a fool i' the forest,
A motley fool; a miserable world!
As I do live by food, I met a fool;
Who laid him down and bask'd him in the sun,
And rail'd on Lady Fortune in good terms,
In set good terms, and yet a motley fool.
"Good morrow, fool," quoth I. "No, sir," quoth he,
Call me not fool till heaven hath sent me fortune:
And then he drew a dial from his poke,
And looking on it with lack-lustre eye,
Says very wisely, "It is ten o'clock:
Thus we may see," quoth he, "how the world wags:
'Tis but an hour ago since it was nine;
And after one hour more 'twill be eleven;
And so, from hour to hour, we ripe and ripe,
And then, from hour to hour, we rot and rot;

And thereby hangs a tale." When I did hear
 The motley fool thus moral on the time,
 My lungs began to crow like chanticleer,
 That fools should be so deep contemplative;
 And I did laugh sans intermission
 An hour by his dial. O noble fool!
 A worthy fool! Motley's the only wear.

Duke S. What fool is this?

Jaques. One that hath been a courtier,
 And says, if ladies be but young and fair,
 They have the gift to know it: and in his brain,
 Which is as dry as the remainder biscuit
 After a voyage, he hath strange places cramm'd
 With observation, the which he vents
 In mangled forms. O that I were a fool!
 I am ambitious for a motley coat.

Well then, to pass from Jaques' to our own appreciation of motley, do you not see Touchstone's suit—scarlet, we will say, down one side, and green down the other—illustrating his own contrast of wit and conduct, in speech after speech! Take, for example, his answer to Corin's query, "And how like you this shepherd's life, Master Touchstone?" and see him exhibiting one side of himself, then the other:

Truly, shepherd, in respect of itself, it is a good life; but in respect that it is a shepherd's life, it is naught. In respect that it is solitary, I like it very well; but in respect that it is private, it is a very vile life. Now, in respect it is in the fields, it pleaseth me well; but in respect it is not in the court, it is tedious. As it is a spare life, look you, it suits my humor; but as there is no more plenty in it, it goes much against my stomach.

The comedy, then, is less a comedy of dramatic event than a playful fantastic criticism of life: wherein, a courtly society being removed to the greenwood, to picnic there, the Duke Senior can gently moralize on the artificiality he has left at home, and his courtiers—being courtiers still, albeit loyal ones—must ape his humors. But this in turn, being less than sincere, needs salutary mockery: wherefore Shakespeare invents Jaques and Touchstone, critics so skillfully opposed, to supply it. But yet again, Jaques' cynicism being something of a pose, he must be mocked at by the Fool; while the Fool, being professionally a fool, must be laughed at by Jaques, and, being betrayed to real folly by human weakness, laughed at by himself. Even Rosalind, being in

love, must play with it. Even honest Orlando, being in love, must write ballads and pin them on oaks; but he writes them so very ill that we must allow him honest. Otherwise I should maintain his ancient servant Adam (whose part Shakespeare himself enacted) to be the one really serious figure on the stage. It is at any rate observable that while, as we should expect, the play contains an extraordinary number of fanciful and more or less rhetorical moralizings—such as the Duke's praise of a country life, Jaques' quoted sermon on the wounded deer and his "All the world's a stage," Rosalind's lecture on the marks of a lover, Touchstone on the virtue in an "If," on the Lie Circumstantial, and on horns (to name but a few), it is Orlando who speaks out from the heart such poetry as:

. whate'er you are
That in this desert inaccessible,
Under the shade of melancholy boughs,
Lose and neglect the creeping hours of time;
If ever you have look'd on better days,
If ever been where bells have knoll'd to church,
If ever sat at any good man's feast,
If ever from your eyelids wiped a tear
And know what 'tis to pity and be pitied,
Let gentleness my strong enforcement be .

while to Adam it falls to utter the sincerest, most poignant, line in the play:

And unregarded age in corners thrown.

An exquisite instance of Shakespeare's habitual stroke!—with which the general idea, "unregarded age," is no sooner presented than (as it were) he stabs the concrete into it, drawing blood: "unregarded age in corners thrown."

But in truth all the rest of our bright characters are not in earnest. They do but *play* at life in Arden. As Touchstone knew, "cat will after kind"; and, as Shakespeare knew, the world is the world as man made it for man to live in it. These courtiers are not *real* Robin Hoods. If they fleet the time carelessly, it is (I suspect) much as people do at Letchworth. No: when the *duc dame*, *duc dame* has been played out, yet not so as to be over-wearied, Shakespeare gathers up his courtiers—as afterwards in *The Tempest* he gathered up the Neapolitan courtiers—and restores them, like so many fish, to their proper element;

even as he himself, after living with shows and making himself a motley to the view, returned to his native Stratford, bought land, and lived doucely. The Duke regains his dukedom, his followers are restored to their estates. By a pretty turn of workmanship, Orlando, who started with a patrimony of "poor a thousand crowns," dependent on an unjust brother, returns as heir apparent and that brother's prospective liege-lord. By an equally pretty turn of irony, the one man—the usurping Duke—who reaches Arden on his own impulse, moved by a ferocious idea to kill somebody, is the only one left there in the end, when the sentimental moralists have done with it, to use it as a school of religious contemplation.

Some critics have held it for a blot on the play that Oliver, his brotherly crime condoned, is allowed to marry a Celia. Shakespeare merely neglects the excuse found for it in Lodge's story, where the repentant elder brother helps to rescue Aliena (Celia) from a band of robbers. It is unsatisfactory, if we will. The play, according to Swinburne, would be perfect "were it not for that one unlucky slip of the brush which has left so ugly a little smear in one corner of the canvas as the betrothal of Oliver to Celia." And George Sand, in her French adaptation, like the bold woman she was, married Celia to—Jaques!

But "perfect," after all, is a word I would like to keep in hand for perfection: and full though *As You Like It* is of life and gaiety and exquisite merriment, on other points than Oliver's betrothal (I have instanced the mechanical introduction, and the rather pointless chop-logic of the First Act), it does not quite reach perfection. And, after all, a fantasy is a fantasy, and forgiveness Christian. I cannot feel my soul greatly perturbed over the mercy shown to Oliver; and I will give Celia to him, any day of the week, to save her from Jaques. The only possible wife for Jaques was one that Shakespeare omitted to provide. She should have to be an arrant shrew, to talk him dumb: and so he and Touchstone might have expiated their criticism together on a fair balance of folly. Rosalind herself would have cured him; but Rosalind, of course, is by miles too good for Jaques. She is reserved to be loved by an honest man his life through; and, like many another dear woman, to nag him, his life through.

Rosalind herself is not perfect; but she is in a way the

better for it, being adorable: at once honest and wayward, "true brow and fair maid," and infinitely tantalizing. She means to be the Nut Brown Maid of the Greenwood, as the whole play seems trying, over and again, to be a Robin Hood play. She means this, I say; but being courtly bred she has to play with it before admitting it. Yet she is honest, and confesses her love almost from the first to herself and to Celia. She does not, as Imogen does, lift the heart out of us, ready to break for her: but she bewitches us, and hardly the less because all the while she allows us to know that the witchery is conscious, intentional.

The play is—as you like it—a woodland play treated courtly-wise, or a courtly play treated woodland-wise. It plainly derives, through *Love's Labour's Lost*, from John Lyly; whose polite comedies, highly artificial, but in one way or another a wonderful artistic advance, held the ear of Court and of City at the moment when Shakespeare set up as a playwright: and I hold that Mr. Warwick Bond, Lyly's learned and devoted editor, makes out unanswerably Shakespeare's debt to Lyly as he was learning dramatic architecture. Mr. Bond says:

That Shakespeare was his [Lyly's] disciple in this respect is beyond a doubt. . . . To the fundamental brainwork which Lyly put into his plays, the greater poet and the Shakespearean stage in general are almost as much indebted as they are to his introduction of a lively, witty and coherent dialogue.

Lyly's notion of a lively and witty dialogue, though begotten (I make no doubt) of an instinct for reform, resulted—like many another innovation—in a tyranny of its own making; and to my taste the dreariest passages in Shakespeare are those in which his ladies and courtiers exchange "wit." But it remains true that if we would understand Shakespeare's workmanship in the early Comedies, and trace how *Love's Labour's Lost* grew into *As You Like It*, we must study Lyly's *Campaspe*, his *Endymion* and his *Galatea*. The main point to grasp is that *As You Like It*, however much improved by genius, belongs to the Lyly line of descent and to the order of the court-pastoral.

The "pastoral" being granted, we may recognize excellent workmanship in the Silvius and Phebe episode. To have garbed Rosalind as a boy without making a girl fall in love with him would have been to miss a plain oppor-

tunity—almost as plain a one as the sight of the bloody cloth at which Rosalind faints. It doubles the intrigue, and it provides with due irony one of the most charming chiming quartets in all Comedy :

Phebe. Good shepherd, tell this youth what 'tis to love.

Silvius. It is to be all made of sighs and tears ;

And so am I for Phebe.

Phebe. And I for Ganymede.

Orlando. And I for Rosalind.

Rosalind. And I for no woman.

and so on, and so on. The *genre* and the convention of it granted, nothing could be prettier than the inter-chime and the counter-chime. It is Lyly carried to a power that Lyly never, at best, got beyond dreaming of.

But, having said this in praise of a piece of good workmanship, I must in fairness mention a piece of sheer botchwork. I mean the introduction of Hymen in the last Act. To explain away this botch as an imposition upon Shakespeare by another hand—to conjecture it as some hasty alternative to satisfy the public censor, who objected to Church rites of marriage on the stage (if carried through)—would be as easy as it were accordant with the nice distinctions of critical hypocrisy, were it not that Shakespeare, almost if not quite to the end of his days, was capable of similar ineptitudes, such as the vision of Posthumus and the scroll dropped into his lap. You can explain away one such lapse by an accident ; but two scarcely, and three or four not at all. That kind of artistic improbability runs almost in harmonical progression.

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